

MEDIASCAN TRANSCRIPT  
NBC MEET THE PRESS  
24 July 1983  
Sunday

KALB: Good day from Washington. I am Marvin Kalb inviting you to Meet the Press with Congressman Michael Barnes, a key critic of the president's policy in Central America.

ANNOUNCER: Meet the Press is a public affairs presentation of NBC News.

KALB: Our guest today on Meet the Press is Congressman Michael Barnes, the Maryland Democrat, who is chairman of the House Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs. Along with three others on Capitol Hill, Mr. Barnes recently urged President Reagan to set up a bipartisan commission on Central America. The president agreed, set up the commission, though its actual purpose is not clear, and he appointed Henry Kissinger to run it. Congressman Barnes is one of nine senior counselors to the commission. Our reporters today are Roland Evans of The Chicago Sun-Times; Henry Trehitt of The Baltimore Sun; Elizabeth Drew of The New Yorker; and to open the questioning, regular panelist, Bill Monroe of NBC News. MONROE: Mr. Barnes, to prevent a Communist takeover in El Salvador, President Reagan wants to apply more military pressure on Nicaragua, more American help for the anti-Communist rebels and U. S. military maneuvers on the edges of Nicaragua. Why not? BARNES: Well, some of that probably makes some sense. I think that you'll find there's a bipartisan consensus in the Congress that there is a military dimension to the challenge that the United States and its friends in the region confront, but that there are other dimensions as well and the Reagan administration has placed its principal emphasis on the military dimension. The reason I think it's unwise right now for the United States to engage in these massive military maneuvers that were announced this week is that it really comes at exactly the wrong time. Last Sunday the four presidents of the so-called Contadora countries, Mexico, Panama, Venezuela and Colombia, met in an urgent emergency session, out of which came a statement that they believe we are headed into a general war in Central America, and they called upon all nations in the Western Hemisphere to make efforts to reduce tensions, to restrain themselves. And the Nicaraguans responded. Two days later, on Tuesday of this week, the Nicaraguans said that in response to the call of the four presidents, they were putting forward a new peace plan with six points, some of which directly confronted some of the issues the United States has been concerned about. The United States has also responded, not yet by addressing what the four presidents of the Contadora countries said, but the United States has announced massive new military maneuvers, has announced a major new plan to upgrade our military presence in Central America. What we're doing really is not an exercise. When you're sending troops into the region for five months or six months, it's not a military exercise. It's a deployment of military force into the region on a long-term basis. Our response to the Contadora initiative and to the urgent plea of four presidents of countries that are friends of the United States has been a tragic mistake and we may be missing a real opportunity here to seize upon this initiative of our friends in the region and to try to bring about a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

MONROE: Well, Congressman, you asked for a commission. You asked for a commission to study some of the issues between you and other Democrats and the president. You've got the commission now. It's headed by Henry Kissinger. You know all the people who are going to be on it. Seeing the composition of the commission and what President Reagan expects from it, what do you expect it to accomplish? BARNES: Well, I'll have to say that I was disappointed, quite frankly, by the selection of Secretary Kissinger

MEDIASCAN - NBC Meet the Press 07/24/83

&

5

and the composition of the commission. Obviously, he's a very able individual and knows foreign policy, but he's best known in Latin America for his role in Chile in the overthrow of the Allende government, at least the preception that he was involved in that. He does not have a background of leadership of Third World development issues, which is what Sen. Jackson and I and others who advocated the commission really see the commission as dealing with. I talked this morning with Sen. Jackson, and we again agree that this commission can play a positive role if it doesn't look at the immediate problem, if the commission doesn't try to get into whether or not the U.S. should be overthrowing the government of Nicaragua, what the aid level should be for Honduras or Salvador in the '84 aid budget. If it leaves aside those day-to-day issues that the president and the Congress have to grapple with now, and try to address, as Sen. Jackson says, the 30-year, 50-year problems of the hemisphere and how the United States can promote our interest in that long-term period, it can play a very positive role. There are some very fine people on the commission, some people of diverse views, although it's not like the Social Security Commission where you had people of direct, conflicting views on the commission. You had Claude Pepper, for example, on the Social Security Commission, who was, you know, had a strong staked-out position on Social Security. You don't have that kind of make up on this commission. I've also talked with Secretary Kissinger within the past couple days about his view of the commission, and he agrees. At least he says that he agrees strongly with Sen. Jackson and with me that the commission should not get into the issues of the moment with respect to Central America. That may not make the White House very happy, and that may not make people who think that this commission is simply gonna support Reagan's policies very happy, but I hope that Secretary Kissinger is serious. He told me he doesn't want to see the commission get into the issue of the '84 aid budget and how much we should be allocating here or there. He said he wants to stay totally out of the issue of covert action, and I thought that he was going along pretty much with the proposal that Sen. Jackson, Sen. Mathias, Congressman Kemp and I had that what we needed was a long-term look at the region, that the U.S. does have important interests in the hemisphere, and that we ought to set aside the issues of the moment and try to take that long-term look.

KALB: Okay. Thank you, Congressman. Our guest on Meet the Press, Congressman Michael Branes. Miss Drew?

DREW: Congressman, Sen. Dodd said this morning that he thought in sending the naval vessels down to the coast of Central America, the administration might be in defiance of the War Powers Act. What do you think? BARNES: Well, its a very serious issue. The chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Clem Zablocki from Wisconsin, and I have both written to the secretary of defense requesting a briefing on exactly what's going on because there is a serious issue of whether or not the War Powers Act is, should be invoked. Clem Zablocki is one of the authors of the War Powers Act. I tried to get that briefing this past week. The Defense Department said they were not yet able to answer questions about what this is all, what this all means and what they're really doing. We intend to get that briefing immediately, and then make some judgments in the Congress about whether, in fact, the War Powers Act should be invoked.

DREW: Your earlier answer suggested that your real problem with what has happened in sending the ships, troops, etc. was timing. And you did say that you thought that there was room for some military action, that the difference is one of emphasis. Could you clarify just a bit just exactly what is your difference with the administration then, other than timing. BARNES: Well, I didn't mean to suggest that I think sending this flotilla with aircraft carriers and ships...

MEDIASCAN - NBC Meet the Press 07/24/83

&

6

DREW: But military action... BARNES: ...ships to Honduras is the appropriate response to the problems in Central America. I don't think it is. I don't think it would have been an appropriate response at any time. But the timing could not have been worse than to do it this week, than to announce it this week right after this emergency urgent session of the four presidents of the Contadora countries in which they called upon us and everybody else in the hemisphere to help reduce tensions in order to permit them to go forward with their initiative. What I meant to suggest when I said that I think there's a bipartisan consensus that there is a military dimension to the threat in the region is that there is a small military dimension to what's going on. There are 5,000 guerrillas in El Salvador, not a major military problem, but it's there. And I think there's been a consensus that the U.S. has some responsibility to assist and deal with that. What we have been doing, tragically really, is putting 90% of our emphasis on the military dimension of the problem in the region and very little emphasis upon the economic, social, political dimension.

DREW: You're.... BARNES: Go ahead.

DREW: Excuse me. You referred to the speech by Mr. Ortega of Nicaragua, the offer of some negotiations. The administration would argue that that would be, might be as a result of having brought pressure on the Nicaraguan regime. Therefore, is it possible that the administration is right, that it will respond to more pressure? BARNES: What, what I'm convinced Ortega was responding to was not the U.S. military pressure and the Contras, the thousands of guerrillas that the United States is financing in Nicaragua, but rather the pressure that they're getting from their friends, from their neighbors, the Contradora group, from the Socialist Internationals. Just within the last couple of weeks, the Socialist Internationals came down pretty hard on the Sandinistas for their policies, domestic and foreign. I think they're responding to those political initiatives from their friends, not to the pressures from the United States. The Christian Science Monitor, Daniel Southerland of The Christian Science Monitor, who's spent some weeks in Nicaragua and in Central America over the last couple of months, had an excellent piece this week in which he said that it is his impression, having just been there, that the Sandinistas are becoming more hardlined, not less, because of the military pressure, that their instinct is to get tougher, to become more repressive at home, and he said, and I think this is almost an exact quote from Mr. Southerland's excellent piece, he said that the ideologues in Managua are feeding the ideologues in Washington and they're both looking at each other from those perspectives, making the situation worse, not better.

KALB: Okay. Mr. Trewhitt, who also has just come back from Central America?

TREWHITT: Congressman, let's explore United States' interests. Is it a vital interest of the United States to prevent the spread of Communism in Central America?

BARNES: Absolutely. I think it is.

TREWHITT: Then, in the final analysis, would you introduce troops into the territory itself in order to prevent that? BARNES: I think that would feed the spread of leftist violence in the region. The vice president of Costa Rica recently said something to me that we ought to be thinking about in the context of sending all of these 5,000 troops and this flotilla to the east and west coasts of Central America. He said everytime the United States increases the American military presence in Central America, the appeal of the left goes up. If we want to assure that at some time in the future the left is gonna take over Central America and the hemisphere generally, all we have to do is continue policies of American interventionism which feed anti-Americanism, which feed the rhetoric of the left. We're playing right into their hands with this kind of policy.

MEDIASCAN - NBC Meet the Press 07/24/83

&

7

TREWHITT: But is there a contradiction in what you're saying? If it is a vital interest of the United States to prevent the spread of Communism, and if it is counterproductive to talk about introducing troops, then where do you draw the line? Don't you have to draw the line either in El Salvador or Honduras before the problem gets to Guatemala and (inaudible, both talking simultaneously)...? BARNES: The worst thing we could do, the worst thing we could do is send American troops into combat in the Western Hemisphere, for, again, the military challenge that's confronted is really a very small one, 5,000 guerrillas. We're not talking about the North Vietnamese army and, said by the Chinese (sic). We're talking about a very small military problem in a country that's one-fifteenth the size of Vietnam. There are ways to do what you suggest, Mr. Trewhitt, and to confront the Communist threat that exists in the region, and the Reagan administration has been doing just the opposite. When the Reagan administration came into office, for example, it basically eliminated the scholarship programs for Latin American students to study in the United States. Right now there are hundreds of Costa Rican students studying in Moscow, studying in Havana. There are hundreds of Panamanians, Dominicans studying at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, on full scholarship. We're not competing to educate the future leadership of the region. The foreign ministers of Peru, of Bolivia, of Ecuador are pleading, of Dominican Republic, are pleading with the United States--democracies that want to be supported--pleading with the Reagan administration for assistance to support democracy. There's a lot of talk in this town about supporting democracy, but what we're doing is sending flotillas of Navy.... We're sending more troops. It's exactly the wrong response. The United States should be holding out positive initiatives. And that's what I hope, quite frankly, the Kissinger commission will come up with. We should be holding out hope to the people of the hemisphere rather than raising the tensions, threatening military action. We're doing this exactly wrong.

KALB: Mr. Evans? EVANS: Congressman, you surprise me a little bit, a man of our background in foreign questions, your answer to the question just before mine. President Johnson sent the Marines into Santa Domingo and into the Dominican Republic almost 20 years ago to ward off a left-wing Marxist takeover. Twenty years later, a democratic government still rules in the Dominican Republic. Have you forgotten that, sir? BARNES: No I haven't. And I remember how it happened. He did it in the context of a formal request from the government of that country. He did it....

EVANS: Sir, you said the introduction... BARNES: ...Well, let me finish.

EVANS: ...of American troops with that...BARNES: He did it under the aegis...

EVANS: ...he introduced American troops...BARNES: Well, he did it under the aegis of the Organization of American States. It was a multilateral effort decided upon by the countries of the Western Hemisphere that there was a crisis that needed to be responded to. Let's compare what we're doing now. Rather than working with the OAS, rather than working with our neighbors in the hemisphere, we are unilaterally financing a supposedly covert effort, thousands of guerrillas. You and I as taxpayers of the United States are paying the salaries of those thousands of guerrillas in Nicaragua, mercenaries basically, that are engaged in trying to overthrow the government of Nicaragua.

EVANS: Yeah. BARNES: A very different kind of action than the one we engaged in...

EVANS: Congressman? BARNES: ...in 1965.

MEDIASCAN - NBC Meet the Press 07/24/83

& 8

EVANS: Excuse me for interrupting. Just to get back, you said a minute ago that the introduction of American troops was the worst possible thing we could do and would guarantee a Marxist takeover. Did that happen, sir, in the Dominican Republic? We had 50,000 Marines there for over six months. BARNES: As part of an Organization of American States support...

EVANS: So, you're saying if the OAS support (inaudible)... BARNES: You have a very, very different situation. When the Organization of American States meets, adopts a formal, takes a formal decision to support one of the member-state countries, you have a totally different situation than what we're talking about now, where the United States not only unilaterally, but going directly against the requests of our neighbors in the country, against the request of Mexico, of Venezuela, Columbia, Panama, democracy. We are not only not acting the way we did in 1965...

EVANS: But... BARNES: ...we're acting directly in opposite, in an opposite way.

EVANS: In other words, sir, it's not the introduction. It's the way they get there? Is that what you're saying? BARNES: Let me just suggest.... You know, I served in the United States Marine Corps. I think the Marines could go into Nicaragua, go into Salvador and take care of those 5,000 guerrillas. That wouldn't be that big a problem, militarily. The problem would be how long are we going to leave the Marines there? Are we gonna leave an occupying force indefinitely? Because I think as soon as the Marines left, there'd be a lot more guerrillas there now, there then than there are now. The situation would be much polarized. We'd see a much more anti-American situation in the left, which has some modest appeal now, could probably get 15% or 20% of the vote in Salvador, could probably get 80% of the vote after we'd done that.

KALB: Mr. Monroe? MONROE: Mr. Barnes, the administration is encouraging Israel to provide captured weapons to the rebels fighting Nicaragua, reportedly so that those rebels will have continuing supplies even if the U.S. Congress prevents America from supplying such aid. Do you have any objection to that maneuver? BARNES: Well, I think it's unfortunate if other countries are gonna be drawn into, if Israel and Honduras, Argentina, apparently, if other countries are gonna be drawn into this illegal and misguided and counterproductive policy of attempting to overthrow the government of Nicaragua. The New York Times had a report this morning that indicated it isn't working. Not only are they not gonna be overthrown, but we're not interdicting arms. All the stated policies, all the stated reasons for this policy are not being carried out, and I think I can confirm, without giving away any secrets, that The New York Times article is basically accurate, that we're not achieving the goals that the administration had set out for its policy.

MONROE: But there wouldn't be any way that Congress could prevent the administration from encouraging other countries to send arms to the rebels fighting against Nicaragua, would there? BARNES: No. Basically, there's no way the United, the Congress can tell Reagan he can't suggest things to other people.

KALB: Miss Drew?

DREW: Mr. Barnes, your disappointment, as you say, about the make up of the commission, which you suggested in the first place, and used the analogy of the Social Security Commission. Given the fact that the MX commission was made up of members who supported the MX, why are you surprised? BARNES: Well, I'm.... I guess I'm not surprised. I, I hoped that we could have a genuinely bipartisan commission in the sense of a substantively bipartisan commission. There are Democrats on this commission

MEDIASCAN - NBC Meet the Press 07/24/83

&

and some very fine ones, but, substantively, you don't have, as I suggest, a commission that's genuinely bipartisan in the sense that the Social Security Commission was, where you brought people together of very conflicting views. When the speaker asked me to serve as one of the two Democrats from the House, along with our Majority Leader Jim Wright, as a counselor to this commission, he said, 'Mike, you know you're going to be a minority of one.' He said, 'There's nobody on the commission, and there are none of the other counselors to this commission who've been publicly critical of the posture the United States has been taking in Central America.' I said to Secretary Kissinger that I feel, I told him what the speaker had said, and I said, 'I feel a real responsibility to represent what I regard as a majority view, not just of Democrats, but of Democrats and Republicans in the Congress that the U.S. policy is a dangerous one, that it's headed us in the wrong direction, and to represent those views very actively as an advocate in my role as a counselor to the commission.' I've been assured by the secretary that all the counselors will have full access to the commission, be able to operate, to attend all the sessions, to get all the papers, and that he will give me every opportunity to present the case that, as I say, I think reflects the majority view. And I'm gonna do that. I'm gonna be all over that commission.

DREW: You mentioned the danger that you thought you saw. I wonder what it is. A few weeks ago, Vice President Mondale on this program said that he thought that the logical extension of the administration's policy is that there will be a direct involvement of American troops in Central America. Do you think so? BARNES: Well, there's certainly, there's certainly that danger at this moment. We're not moving away from that. We're moving toward that kind of outcome. I don't, frankly, think that's that what President Reagan wants, but I'm less sure of that today than I was 10 days ago.

MONROE: Senator, let me ask you what do you think is the main purpose in setting up this commission? Do you think that it's a smoke screen, as Sen. Byrd said? Think it's just good politics? BARNES: Well, I suspect that the selection of Secretary Kissinger to chair it was regarded as a political move by the people in the administration, that he can be the lightning rod to take a lot of the heat with respect to Central America policy, sort of the James Watt of Latin America policy. All the heat will be tossed to Kissinger. I don't think that if the commission does what Mr. Kissinger and Sen. Jackson and I want it to do, that that will, in effect, be the result. I don't think, for example, that my colleagues this week, when we vote on the covert action legislation in the House, will be able to use the commission as a dodge. Some of them may try, but I don't think that that'll be a realistic way for them to get around having to face the real issues that we confront on a day to day basis.

KALB: Okay. Mr. Trewhitt?

TREWHITT: Congressman, back to El Salvador for a second. I, from my own trip, I tend to agree with you about the manageability of the guerrilla problem as such. But how does one go about bringing under control for the long term, the right-wing in El Salvador, which directly, or indirectly is responsible for those death squads which are killing whimsically, if not at random? BARNES: Well, this is, this is one of the areas where the Reagan administration has really fallen down, I think, by not adequately making it clear that the United States will not continue to support a government that can't control these just very vicious death squads. Just within the last few weeks one of the Christian Democratic members of the Constituent Assembly in Salvador was threatened with death for having made the statement that the armed forces

MEDIASCAN - NBC Meet the Press 07/24/83

& 10

needed to control themselves. And the way he was threatened with death was that a dead body was put out in the streets of San Salvador with a message tied around its neck, threatening him for having made these kinds of statements. The Reagan administration likes to argue that its present policy in Salvador is a continuation of the Carter policy. That's just not the case. You can talk to Ambassador Robert White who was Carter's ambassador there. Or you can talk to Larry \*Pazula who was our ambassador under Carter in Nicaragua. You can talk to President Carter about whether or not it's a continuation of policy. The Carter policy was clearly aimed at strengthening the center and trying to reduce the influence of the right and the left. The Reagan policies, unfortunately, have tended to strengthen the right, not only in Salvador, but throughout Central America and throughout Latin America generally.

KALB: We've got a little less than two minutes. Mr. Trewhitt, continue.

TREWHITT: I just want to continue and ask whether you think the elections should proceed in El Salvador as they are now scheduled this year, in the circumstances you set out? BARNES: Well, I, I've never been one of those who was critical of the holding of elections. In fact, frankly, I hope that this next set of elections will, will result in a better outcome than the ones in March of last year. In my judgment, the bad guys won that election. The Christian Democrats got the most votes, but a coalition of five hard-core right-wing parties were able to put together a majority in the Constituent Assembly.

KALB: Mr. Trewhitt, Mr. Evans?

EVANS: Congressman, you're against the introduction of American troops into the field. You have said it's a tragic mistake that the president is sending a naval task force down there to show American intention. How do you feel about expanding the number of American military advisers to help the Salvadoran army deal with this guerrilla problem? Are you also against that? BARNES: I think at this time, it would be a mistake. Again, what we ought to be trying to do is not suggest further Americanization, further militarization. We ought to be trying to reduce tensions and help the Contador process.

EVANS: You are against anything that involves the military in this situation. Is that a fair statement, sir? BARNES: No. No. I've tried to suggest that that's not a fair statement. I've never argued that five more advisers here, or 10 more million dollars there is the issue. The issue is the policy. If we are using our military support to bring about reform in Salvador, then we're seriously confronting the threat of the guerrillas.

KALB: Congressman, thank you for being our guest today on Meet the Press. Commenting on last week's program with economist Alan Greenspan, Joan \*Broan writes from New York, 'I don't know how Alan Greenspan could talk about a recovery when there are so many unemployed. We have people who are not concerned about the less fortunate and would like to sweep this under the rug.' Thomas Moran writes from San Francisco, 'Alan Greenspan always hits the nail on the head. The basic economic problem, longer term investments, would be solved, if congressmen would be a little less politicians and a little more statesmen.' The address to write to if you would like to comment on today's program is Meet The Press, NBC, Washington, D.C., 20016. For a printed transcript of Meet The Press, send one dollar and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Kelly Press, Box 8648, Washington, D. C., 20011. Thank you for joining us. I am Marvin Kalb, saying good bye for Congressman Michael Barnes and Meet the Press. Betty Turner, Transcriber

MEDIASCAN - NBC Meet the Press 07/24/83

& 11